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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses issues and the viability of applying participatory management (PM) to education, with focus on Total Quality Management (TQM). Following a description of PM techniques with an TQM focus and a historical overview of Deming's management theory, four stages of team growth experienced during the implementation process are described--forming, storming, norming, and performing. Thirteen barriers to the institutionalization of PM practices are identified, some of which include: employees' fear of changes in the organization of work; adversarial management-employee relations; a view of PM as a quick fix; lack of commitment and leadership; and lack of team member training. Solutions are offered to each of the barriers, some of which include: establish a clear policy; use trained facilitators; provide training and inservicing of administrators and employees; emphasize the process as well as the product; and provide team rewards. In conclusion, PM and TQM are viable alternatives to current western management practices in corporations and schools. One table is included. (LMI)

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PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT EMPHASIZING QUALITY: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR AMERICAN CORPORATIONS AND SCHOOLS?

by
Kim E. Sheane, Ed.D.

While the decade of the '80s witnessed the decline of many American corporations, the decade of the '90s has unleashed unparalleled criticism regarding the decline in American students' academic achievements. Critics charge that both of these entities have enjoyed a captive audience for far too long and have ignored the implications of competing in a global economy. The responsibility for resolving these crises has been laid at the feet of corporate executives and school district administrators who have typically relied on their restrictive, top-down, autocratic management practices to regain the prominence they once enjoyed. And according to Dr. W. Edwards Deming, the renowned American guru of management practices, it is only right that management accept the blame that is rightfully theirs and begin, instead, to promote participatory management (PM) with a Total Quality Management (TQM) focus.

Key questions that arise include what exactly these practices are, how school and corporate teams evolve through the process, and effective solutions to overcoming barriers. This paper highlights answers to these questions and promotes the notion that PM and TQM are viable alternatives to current Western management practices in corporations and schools.

What is Participatory Management with a Total Quality Management Focus?

PM refers to "those techniques and practices which increase employee involvement in areas which can improve work practices, managerial decision-making processes, and organizational performance standards" (Gilberg, 1988, p. 109). In essence, it is designed to empower employees--indeed, all stakeholders. TQM is "the name given to an approach for running large, complex organizations...that combines a strong focus on customer satisfaction with a set of statistical tools and decision making techniques that enable workers to constantly improve the processes in which they are engaged" (Olson, 1992, p. 8). In sum, when adopted as an organization's philosophy, management practices emphasize team decision making with a TQM focus--meaning that teams are charged with making decisions regarding not only the quality of the final product but the quality of the processes which contribute to the final product (i.e., outcome). Many believe that only when this occurs will American corporations and schools have a vehicle by which excellence can occur.

What is the History of PM?

Dr. W. Edwards Deming achieved virtually overnight credibility and fame in Japan in the early 1950s when his teachings on statistical processes and quality management were incorporated into the Japanese business environment. Today, they are the acknowledged leaders in quality control and efficiency--all credited by Deming to a change in their management practices. An ardent critic of Western style management, Deming teaches that PM emphasizing quality can provide all organizations with a process designed to employ the expertise of all employees in decision making processes and setting performance standards. His "call to arms" has been directed at not only American corporate executives but also school district administrators--as detailed in his "14 Points of Theory Management."

Deming's theory forces management to examine the larger picture and assume a leadership role if PM emphasizing quality is to be effective. Without management's complete dedication to the new philosophy, Deming warns that all efforts to implement the new management practice will surely fail. For example, in order for a school

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district to make the transition from autocratic management practices to PM, it is critical that all stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students, community members, business partners) not only receive training in the principles of TQM but also understand the stages of team growth and maturity each will experience.

What are The Stages of Team Growth?

There are four stages of growth that corporate and school teams experience as they attempt to implement PM: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Maxfield, 1992).

Forming is the earliest stage of compiling a team; members are uncomfortable not only with each other but the process as well. Members are not confident that the new philosophy is here to stay and are reluctant to raise issues due to a lack of trust.

Storming is characterized by disagreements; issues get addressed, but there is an obvious need to train members and establish ground rules in order to work past disagreements.

Norming has team members accepting each other's roles and agendas; there is sufficient trust among team members and in the team process that members are learning how to effectively examine processes for improvement. To reach this stage, it takes teams a minimum of three years and requires training, little or no turnover in members, and the endorsement of administrators. While teams can reach the norming stage without having formalized their policies and parameters, they will always remain advisory--as opposed to being empowered--since no one can trust an ad hoc, informal governance structure.

Performing has team members anticipating problems and taking proactive measures to prevent them from occurring. Teams operate within the parameters of a formalized document detailing policies and procedures; practice the concept of "seamless" teams (e.g., identifying administrators with the authority to endorse or reject the decision and include them in the decision making process); and incorporate evaluation components of PM emphasizing quality into the annual performance reviews of all employees. These evaluation components include self, peer, administrator, and subordinate instruments developed as a result of stakeholder consensus.

Knowing the stages of team growth assists team members in two ways. First, teams are able to acknowledge their own stage of growth and know that each one is necessary in maturing as a team member. Second, as the composition of a team changes--existing members can articulate to new members where they are in the process and work to assimilate them into the team decision making process. To best facilitate this transition, it is imperative to have a formalized document outlining corporate/district, division/school site, and team policies and parameters so that new members can be inserviced in the governance structure, thereby allowing them to experience the storming and norming stages more quickly. Inservicing new members in the stages of team growth and the seamless team concept are also necessary for their effective involvement.

Not until teams reach the norming stage of team growth do they have the maturity as team members to focus their attention on making decisions related to improving the quality of the processes instead of the product itself. This is important because corporations and school districts have been accused of focusing only on their respective "bottom lines"--profit margins and standardized achievement scores--to the exclusion of all else. Consequently, members must be inserviced in the principles of TQM as early as possible.

What are Key Barriers and Solutions?

While acknowledging that corporations provide services and manufacture "widgets" while school districts strive to meet the holistic needs of their students, the barriers encountered by each are similar when shifting from top-down authoritative management practices to PM emphasizing quality. The figure below details the barriers as extracted from primary and secondary research conducted by the author and proposes solutions for organizations struggling to institutionalize PM in their management practices.

Participatory Management Emphasizing TQM: Key Barriers and Solutions

	BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
1	**Employees feared** that their effective involvement in PM emphasizing quality would lead to changes in the organization of work that were not to their benefit, such as increased work loads or even loss of jobs.	**Establish a policy** outlining the procedures to be followed regarding surplus employees. Options such as reassignment, retraining, and assistance in seeking external job opportunities are detailed.
2	**Adversarial relations** between management and employees occurred as a result of previous and/or current autocratic practices that: ▸ placed a high value on tradition and maintenance of the status quo ▸ emphasized a philosophy of uniformity, consistency, and control from the top rather than individual initiative and freedom at the "grass roots" level ▸ adhered to a rigid bureaucratic governance structure.	**Use trained facilitators** who have no vested interest in the outcome to resolve conflict and promote consensus decision making among team members. In addition, all members of a team must agree to not actively undermine the process.
3	Administration **viewing PM as a "quick fix"** underestimated the complexity of shared decision making that inevitably resulted in the discouragement of team members.	**Training and inservicing of administrators** in PM emphasizing quality must occur prior to any administrative decision to change management practices and governance structures.
4	**A lack of commitment--and therefore, leadership--**by administration to endorse the shift from a top-down, hierarchial governance structure to one of PM emphasizing quality was mirrored in a lack of buy-in from employees.	**Management must no longer be evaluated solely on Management by Objectives (MBOs)** that only emphasize the product and not the process. Instead, every administrator must also formulate an action plan--in conjunction with team members--detailing the division/school site's contribution to PM emphasizing quality.
5	**Little or no training** was provided for team members when making the transition to a PM governance structure emphasizing quality.	A minimum of **20 hours of training per employee** must be provided annually in just team building and TQM practices (e.g., stages of team growth and maturity; conflict resolution; facilitation skills; collaborative decision making).
6	The **quality of products and/or processes appeared to deteriorate rather than improve** because of the higher standards, which initially resulted in team discouragement.	Inservice all employees in how to **manage the change** as it relates to incorporating the vision and goals of the corporation/school district into collaborative decision making.
7	Administration's **lack of confidence in employees' ability to contribute to the process** was counteractive toward the fostering of a new PM philosophy emphasizing quality.	All team members must have the **same training** so that everyone is an equal player on the team.
8	**Time constraints and technical decisions** requiring experts were unable to attend team meetings.	Administrators must **acknowledge situational barriers and work to remove them.**

Participatory Management Emphasizing TQM: Key Barriers and Solutions

(continued)

	BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
9	Subordinate barriers existed when **non-managerial employees resisted involvement** in PM emphasizing quality due to the lack of an organizational climate supportive of employee participation without fear of reprisals.	Administrators must be willing to **"walk their talk"** to foster buy-in from team members still uncertain as to whether the new management practices are here to stay.
10	**Lack of a formalized document** caused teams to operate under ad hoc, informal practices that did not promote trust and limited their effectiveness as decision makers; consequently, administrators retained the sole authority to endorse or reject a team's recommendation.	A **formalized document** of policies, procedures, and parameters relating to PM emphasizing quality must be established so that trust in the process can be fostered between administrators and subordinates.
11	Administrators acknowledged the benefits of PM emphasizing quality but did not know how they could confidently **empower team members** to make decisions for which they, in turn, were still held accountable.	All teams must practice the **"seamless" team concept** that identifies the administrators with the authority to endorse/reject the team's decision and include them in the decision making process.
12	Teams **did not include in their vision** the TQM concepts of identifying internal and external customers and their needs, making customer satisfaction the primary goal of every employee, and having employees work closely together to find the best ways of getting the job done.	**Individual recognition must be replaced with team rewards** as collaborative decisions are translated into actions that identify internal and external customers' needs, promote customer satisfaction, and improve the quality of the processes by which the final product occurs.
13	The **lack of formalized instruments evaluating employees' contributions** to PM emphasizing quality was evident; consequently, PM was not a high priority for division or school administrators.	To reach the "performing" stage of team growth, **evaluation instruments** (e.g., self, peer, administrator, subordinate) must measure each team member's contribution to the PM process.

Conclusion

Many American corporations and school districts, frustrated in their struggle to improve their outcomes, are currently implementing PM with a TQM focus. While it is acknowledged that old habits die hard, it is only with management's total commitment to the new philosophy--and willingness to acknowledge barriers and adopt solutions--will the benefits associated with PM emphasizing quality be realized. As management seeks a viable alternative to autocratic management practices, the message from revitalized organizations' may very well be: lead, follow, or get out of the way.

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